

REMARKS

The present Amendment is in response to the Office Action dated December 23, 2003 in reference to the above-identified application. The Examiner set a shortened statutory period for reply of three (3) months, making the present Amendment due by March 23, 2004.

In the Office Action, claims 1-9, and 11-31 were pending. Applicant notes with appreciation the allowance of claims 1-9, 11-17, and 27-30 and further that claims 25 and 26 would be allowable if rewritten into independent form. Claims 18, 19, 21-24, and 31 have been finally rejected under 35 U.S.C. 112, first paragraph.

Without conceding the Examiner's position with respect to the rejected claims and in order to obtain prompt allowance of the present application, Applicant has amended claim 18 to now further recite the limitations in allowable claim 25. Claim 25 has been canceled and the dependency of claim 26 has been changed so that it now depends from claim 18. In addition, claim 31 has been amended to further include the brine refill step.


Additionally, Applicant has addressed the informality noticed by the Examiner with respect to claims 19 and 24. These claims have been amended to cure the lack of antecedent basis for "the step of collecting."

No additional claims fees are believed to be payable upon the Amendment. However, the Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any deficiency in the required fees, or to credit any overpayment, to deposit account number 13-1940.

Based on the foregoing, Applicant submits that the present application is in complete condition for allowance, and action to that end is courteously solicited. If any issues remain to be resolved prior to the granting of this application, the Examiner is requested to contact the undersigned attorney for the Applicant at the telephone number listed below.

Respectfully submitted,

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CERTIFICATE OF MAILING UNDER 37 C.F.R. 1.8

I hereby certify that the foregoing **AMENDMENT (17 pages)** is being deposited with the United States Postal Service as first-class mail in an envelope addressed to Mail Stop Non-Fee Amendment, Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450 on this 23rd day of March, 2004.


Rebecca A. Gegick